

VII. Infrastructure and Amenities

The varying character zones along the Isleta corridor come together to create the area's sense of place, and infrastructure and amenities are an inherent part of that character. From Bridge to approximately Lakeview, Isleta Boulevard is lined with commercial and residential structures close to the street, creating a semi-urban atmosphere along with a multi-lane roadway. Yet from Lakeview south to Isleta Pueblo, Isleta Boulevard becomes increasingly rural, with large lots of alfalfa fields and open space along the roadway, which is only two lanes and quite rural in its design. The same can be seen with water and sewer: whereas the northern portion of Isleta Boulevard has infrastructure like the City of Albuquerque, with a high capacity central water and sewer system, the southern portion of Isleta Boulevard's infrastructure is much smaller in its capacity.

Infrastructure and amenities are the skeletal backbone components that serve South Valley residents. Because private development tends to follow the location, quantity, and quality of public services, deciding where and how a community invests in public services plays a large role in determining where and how commercial, residential, and industrial development occurs. In this planning process and others, South Valley residents have gone to great lengths to articulate their vision for local infrastructure, including where and how development should occur in the Valley.

But infrastructure is about more than what is happening on the street or underground in the water systems. For the Isleta corridor, its infrastructure connects it to the entire region, particularly in terms of traffic congestion.

Residents know that the infrastructure and amenities of the Isleta corridor are central to its sense of place and their own satisfaction as residents. The community's hopes for high quality infrastructure that meets their needs focuses on Traffic Congestion, Road Design, Low-Impact Stormwater Drainage, Trail Network, and Access to Amenities.



The corridor's varying character zones (above: Northern Isleta Blvd; below: Southern Isleta Blvd) are reflected in its varying infrastructure

Source: Geri Knoebel



A. TRAFFIC CONGESTION

Residents of the South Valley have become increasingly unhappy with traffic congestion on Isleta Boulevard. Anyone who regularly travels along Isleta Boulevard can describe how much traffic has increased in the last ten years, primarily due to the regional nature of road congestion. Any roadway's traffic patterns are heavily influenced by conditions outside the boundaries of the immediate community. This is as true for Isleta Boulevard as it is for any road that is connected to a network of arterials.

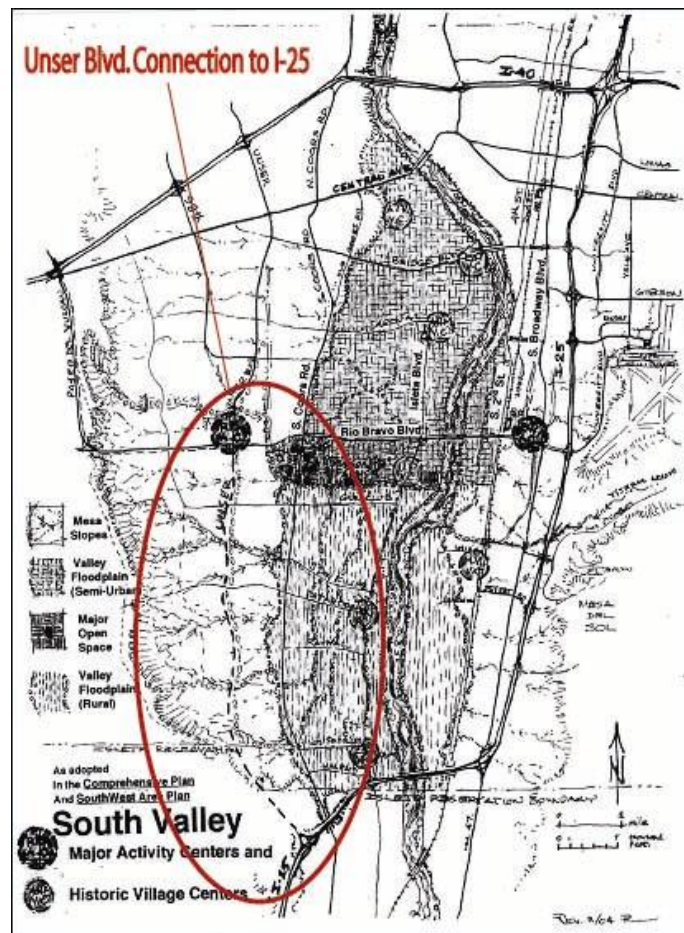
As described throughout this plan, rapid population growth in the Southwest portion of Bernalillo County and Albuquerque is the cause of much of the change along the Isleta corridor. Because Isleta Boulevard is one of only two major north-south roadways serving the residents living west of the Rio Grande, the South Valley becomes a crossroads for the large commuting population from the Westside traveling to Albuquerque. Problems stemming from traffic congestion include residents' frustration, a higher likelihood that economic development will be geared toward busy commuters instead of to local communities, and local community roadways transitioning into heavily-trafficked, high-speed thoroughfares. Although regional solutions to traffic congestion are outside the scope of the sector plan, the planning process spent some time talking through traffic congestion issues with community members and centered on two policy options that could help ease traffic congestion along the Isleta corridor: extending Unser Boulevard and protecting Pajarito Road.

Extending Unser to I-25

In the Mid-Region Council of Government's (MR-COG) Long Range Transportation Plan, Paseo del Volcan and Unser Boulevard are both identified as options for an extension south to I-25 to provide another north-south arterial to the region. Residents who participated in this planning process felt that Paseo del Volcan was a bad choice because it lies so far west of current Westside development that it would promote additional housing construction to the far West while still not meeting the need for a new north-south arterial convenient to current development.

Unser Boulevard is a better choice to be the region's major north-south arterial, and this sector plan strongly recommends that regional governments pursue its extension rather than Paseo del Volcan.

Unser already lies amidst existing Westside development, so will not act as an inducer of additional sprawl. Since it is convenient to existing development, it will be relied upon more often than would Paseo del Volcan, which would be out of the way for Westside



Proposed Unser Blvd. extension as proposed by Paul Lusk
Source: Paul Lusk

residents needing to drive east for work.

The extension of Unser would involve cooperating with Isleta Pueblo for the small portion of Unser that would cross their land to connect with I-25. Regional traffic needs are strong enough to warrant the pursuit of this expansion. *(South Valley resident Paul Lusk has drawn a detailed map of a proposed Unser expansion that works with the natural slope of the land and would be preferred to a straight-line extension south. See graphic on previous page.)*

Pajarito and the Long Range Transportation Plan

The MR-COG Long Range Transportation Plan currently designates Pajarito Road as a Major Road for river crossings. In this planning process, residents continually voiced concern that labeling a rural community roadway like Pajarito as a major river crossing could prove disastrous for future community planning efforts. The infrastructure of Pajarito is not equipped to handle major east-west river crossings, nor does the surrounding community desire the drastic character changes that would accompany such a drastic change in use. This sector plan strongly recommends that Pajarito's Major Road designation be removed from the regional Long Range Transportation Plan.

B. ROAD DESIGN

As local residents tell it, the Isleta corridor's semi-rural character and quality of life are being threatened by road design that caters only to the automobile. The U.S. has been a world leader in developing new and better techniques for moving cars faster and more efficiently on our roads. However, this view of design undermines safe pedestrian activity and the use of alternative transportation such as bicycles and mass transit. It also overlooks the negative environmental impacts each automobile makes as driving becomes more predominant. Finally, it overlooks the issue of affordability and mobility, ignoring and discounting those who do not or cannot use automobiles. For these reasons, the residents of the South Valley have expressed their desire to



Typical stretch of the southern Isleta corridor
Source: Geri Knoebel

'take back the road' and make motorists realize that they are sharing space. Along the Isleta corridor, sharing the roads means sharing them with pedestrians, horseback riders, bicycles, and even tractors.

One of the ways in which the residents of the South Valley can create safer neighborhoods and improve the environment and their quality of life is through encouraging road designs that calm traffic and increase mobility and access for pedestrians.

The Isleta Boulevard Design Overlay (*see section 7.1.8 in this sector plan for specific Road Design ordinance*) includes policies to reduce automobile speeds, maintain semi-rural character through road design, protect the quite rural nature of Isleta Boulevard south of Lakeview, improve pedestrian safety, and use vegetation to contribute to the area's sense of place.

C. LOW-IMPACT STORMWATER DRAINAGE

The impacts of development along Isleta Boulevard in the rural portions of the South Valley have created a need for better stormwater drainage solutions. The increase in impermeable surfaces via homes, driveways, and parking lots has increased water runoff and puddles near walking spaces and onto the roadway. However, community members state that developing forms of stormwater management such as curb and gutter south of Lakeview, in the more rural area of the Isleta corridor, is undesirable given the character changes associated with high-impact infrastructure.

For the past few years, Isleta Boulevard has undergone a major county-sponsored infrastructure improvement project. New road design and drainage was installed from Bridge to Arenal in Phase 1. In Phase 2, which should begin in Fall 2005, new road design and drainage infrastructure will be installed for Arenal to Rio Bravo.

Throughout this planning process, residents expressed a strong desire for the most rural section of Isleta Boulevard south of Lakeview to retain its existing character through appropriately rural infrastructure development. Any new infrastructure south of Lakeview should enhance the local environment, protect public health, and improve the quality of life in the community without having adverse effects of high-impact development. Drainage solutions for the Isleta corridor can be met in Low-Impact Development (LID), an innovative stormwater management approach that is modeled after nature's hydrology.

The purpose of local stormwater drainage policy is to improve the quality of life and protect the sense of place along the Isleta corridor by utilizing simple and effective low-impact stormwater drainage management techniques. The Isleta Boulevard Design Overlay (*see section 7.1.9 in this sector plan for specific Drainage ordinance*) includes policies to accommodate drainage on-site from a menu of drainage options and to use vegetation to enhance soil stability and health.



Examples of a swale, filter drain and infiltration device

D. TRAIL NETWORK

Walking trails play a critical role in the community's health and safety. They allow for safe pedestrian activity, promote utilization of other local amenities, and encourage physical health. Currently, the South Valley is home to only a limited trail network for pedestrian walkability. In addition, many services in the South Valley are inaccessible by pedestrians on foot. Without proper trails infrastructure, walking to and from services can be difficult and hazardous.

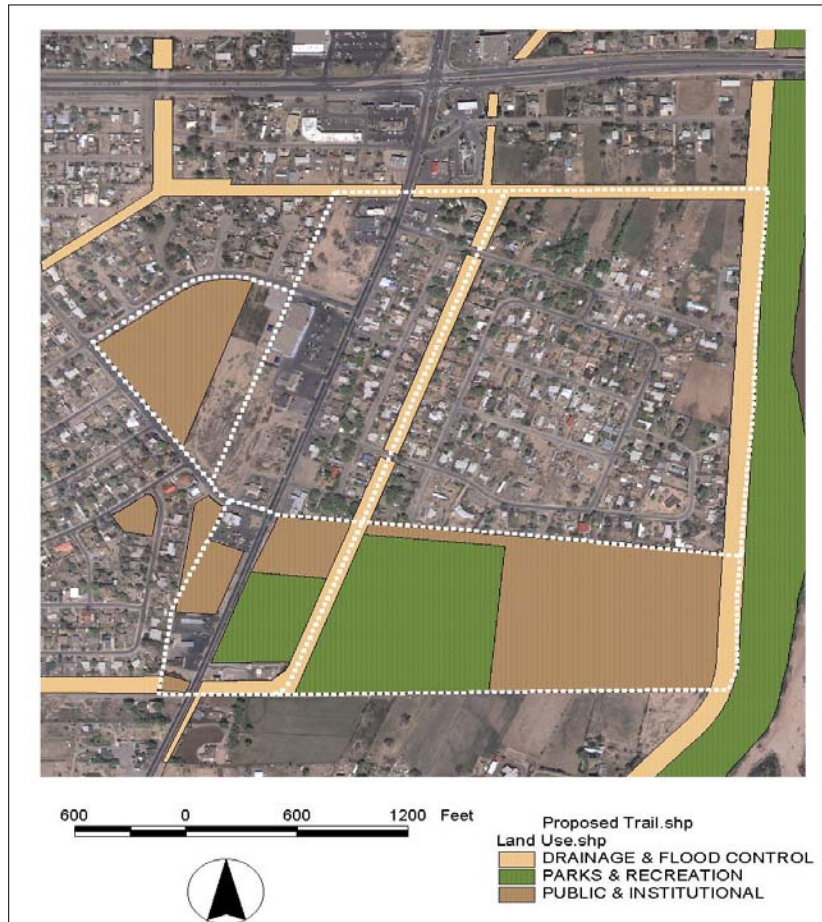


Coordination of the acequia system for walking trail purposes would be an invaluable community resource

Yet a prime opportunity to expand the local trail network exists in the area's historic acequia system, which could act as a major enhancement to existing walking trails in the South Valley. The area's acequia system is a major cultural resource of the South Valley. Local acequias help keep the Valley floor "green" and define the South Valley as a unique and special place within the Albuquerque region. The canals and drains have historically served as trails for utilitarian travel and for recreation on foot, bicycle, and horseback. The canals and drains also serve as a linear open space and habitat for a rich variety of flora and fauna, including many large cottonwoods and other community-valued trees along the Isleta corridor.

The development of adjacent and surrounding land for urban uses increasingly stresses and threatens the canals and drains. Barriers such as fencing and busy roadways have broken up what was once an interconnected and easily accessible trails system.

The Isleta Boulevard Design Overlay (*see section 7.1.10 in this sector plan for specific Trail Network ordinance*) includes policies to promote trail connections between Village Centers, resolve the liability issue between various governmental agencies, and retain or provide



Example of a trail network design in the Adobe Acres Village Center

ditch access in order to allow for safe pedestrian activity, promote the utilization of local amenities like the acequia system, and encourage the physical health of the community.

E. ACCESS TO AMENITIES

Throughout the planning process, many residents expressed concern about the limited access to amenities and open space in the South Valley. Specifically, meeting participants felt that there is not sufficient opportunity to access designated open space along the Isleta corridor, including the bosque.

Bosque Access

A new bosque access point in the southern portion of the Isleta corridor in early 2005 was a welcome addition to the community for many residents, yet they found the lack of parking and signage to be frustrating. As this sector plan recommended in the Trail Network section, a unified trail strategy complete with signage is recommended for the corridor.



Hubbell House in 1867

Source: Bernalillo County Open Space

Hubbell House

Access to the corridor's other amenities is more complex. While the historic Hubbell House was recently purchased by Bernalillo County Open Space, many residents are confused about the status of the space for public access. Although the property is undergoing renovations and community members understand it is a fragile structure, they are less clear about the open space surrounding the property and expressed a desire for regular communication from County Open Space about the property, in addition to signage and parking.



Hubbell House in 2004

Source: Paiz Family

Farming on County Open Space land

Another issue that arose from the sector plan public meetings was farming on County open space land. Currently, the County does provide some farming opportunities on open space land. Interested parties must buy liability insurance, farm at least one acre, and are only approved for one-year contracts.

During community meetings for the sector plan, many residents felt that these circumstances presented roadblocks to area residents interested in farming. County open space land seemed like an ideal amenity that could encourage local farming and add to the local food supply, but residents notice that much of the land has been sitting fallow.



Many community members express interest in farming County open space land, but cite several factors that act as disincentives to their participation

Source: Geri Knoebel

The following suggestions for amending the policy of farming on County open space land were suggested:

- **Review the liability issues surrounding farming on County land.** Many residents hoped that policy surrounding the insurance farmers are required to buy could be amended in favor of something less expensive.
- **Adjust the acreage limit for farming.** Many residents who support local farming would like to try out farming themselves, but want to start small. Other residents are interested in intensive small-scale farming and are only interested in very small plots. In both cases, an acre is more land than these potential farmers are interested in farming. Lowering the acreage limit (or doing away with one) would allow more flexibility in the choices available to interested farmers.
- **Increase the length of farming contracts.** Community members felt that being able to sign a contract for only one year is a disincentive to farm County open space land, and in the end limits the success of long-term sustainable agriculture in the community. One year is a very short time for a contract, especially considering that factors like weather and general farming risk often mean that one year's crop could fail while the next year's crop could do very well. In addition, farmers hoping to receive organic certification from the State must farm the same piece of land for three years in order to qualify, so the short contract could inhibit their long-range planning. A long-term strategy would allow them much more flexibility and room for long-term success.